



IRANOLOGY

QUESTION & ANSWER

About historical , cultural & civilizational background of Iran

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IRAN, CULTURE & CIVILIZATION

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Iranian Islam

For Iranians, Islam can not be segregated from Iranian Culture & with the particular complexion it has, it is distinctly distinguishable from typical Arab way of life as is in vogue in the Saudi Arabia, the U.A.E, Egypt, Syria & even the contiguous Iraq.

The Battle of Al Qadesiyeh marks the beginning of the Arab occupation of Iran. The Iranians under Rostam .e. Farrokhzad were defeated & the Sasanians were pushed back. Two years after two years fall to the zeal & hardihood of the Arab. The story from the fall of Ctesiphon to that of Persepolis is a short one. Abdollah bin Masoud finished the work of Saad bin Waqas & in 650 A.D. the Arab reached the borders of Oxus & India. Yazgerde III, the last Sasanian king died in 651 A.D.

Conflict of arms ceased, but then, began the real conflict between the two peoples, the Victor & the Vanquished, the former belonging to the Semitic stock, the latter to the Aryan. The former had retained his simple Bedouin way of life. The latter, on the other hand, were extremely cultured people who, for several millenniums, were engaged in the practice of arts & literatures, & in scholastic pursuits. They lost their territory their religion too, to the former. But then, the Iranians belittled their victor Arabs by the majestic stature of their culture it was in the bitter & long-drawn cultural conflict that they ultimately defeated them.

Iranians refused to be submerged by the tide & lose their identity as an ancient nation with an extremely developed civilization & culture & this was the "casus belli" of the conflict "Khalafat" & the institution in its lieu of "Imamat" of typical Iranian brand. This warrants a little elucidation.

It is remarkable that the Iranians specifically espoused the cause of Imam Ali & his son Imam Hosain from the prophet's daughter Fatemeh. According to the original traditions, Imam Hosain had married Shahrbanu the daughter of the last Sasanian king: Yazdgerd III. This was a fact of singular importance. It was really on this account that the idea of the "Imam" grew. And for this matter "Imamat" as much belongs to Iran as to the Shiite creed.

The Iranians believed in the theory of Divinity of the King whom they regarded as the Cosmic Ruler, the lord of the seven climes & four quarters

of the world . He was shadow of God on the Earth . Continuously under the Achamenids , the Parthians & the Sasanians they regarded their hereditary Kingship as a divine institution .

So that the Idea of electing a khalifeh was grossly disagreeable to them . they were extremely cultured & refined urban people & in a large measure , despised their Arab masters & their Bedouin manners & customs .

The Theory of kingly Divinity was in Contradiction to tribal Arab custom of election & was essentially an Iranian feature . The Sasanian kings , the last of whom was overthrown by the Arabs , called themselves “ Gods “ or “ khodayan “ or “Divine Beings “ . Iranian Doctrine of the Divine Right of Kingship was really the basis on which “ Imam “ was instituted , & it was an exclusively Iranian & Shiite office .

Did Iranian Islam or shiism develop its creed in this particular style as a measure against Pan-Arabism ?

That this was the main trend of the Iranian thought for centuries thereafter is borne by Ferdosi's Shahnameh , the most popular classic of Iran composed in the 10 th .A.d. In it , the poet developed , most artistically , the Divine right of kingship , held during the Sasanian period . It described beautifully in 60000 couplets , the history of Iran from the Legendary times to Arab occupation . pre – Eminently, the classic was founded on the principle that the Iranian kingship derived its authority from immemorial antiquity rather than from the recent occupation, thus belittling the physical occupation of the country . vis-à-vis its superior cultural history .

Ferdosi held that royalty cannot be seized & the right to the sacred throne of Iran comes by lineal descent only . Khalifeh was an elected head of Islamic state but he does not possess that “ blue blood “ . Imams , on the other hand , were descendants of the Divine Beings .

The daughter of the last Sasanian king was married to Imam Hosain & the later Imams were descendants . They represented not only the prophetic but also the Divine & Kingly right & virtue . He was the ideal ruler or ideal state who derived his authority from God & none else .

The Iranian intellectuals continuously subscribed to the hereditary principle & the Divine right of Kingship which was gradually transferred from the “Imam “ to the king or the “ shah “ or “ padeshah “ .

The Iranian influence completely submerged the Arab Empire of Iran during the Abbasid period. With the predominance of the Iranian culture , the very religion of Islam , at least in Iran & the adjoining regions , also changed its form & fabric & with it , the character & complexion of the Islamic State with its seat at Baqdad , also changed from nomadic to urban ,

from Militant to Civil & from Democracy to Despotism & Absolutism , & from primitive tribal family to a Culture State – precisely, from an Arabian Rule to an Iranianised State .

Finally, from the pahlavi & the Arabic , the Iranians developed their own language , viz. the Persian which soon became the language of the people & then the State . They repudiated the idea of the Khalafat & in its place developed , the religious institution of Imamat based on the concept of Divine Right , as has already been explained above . They developed their own cultural institutions based on their ancient traditions .

Only the Quran as the word of Allah remained the religious book & Mecca as the seat . Everything else was changed in accordance with Iranian cultural susceptibilities .

All this was vindication of Iranian Nationalism & national aspirations & virtual negation of the Bedouin pan-Arabism which the orthodox were trying to impose upon the world through such a pure & simple religion as Islam .

This is how the dictum : The land , The people , The culture , proved its historical veracity . The Land which supports a people who develop a Culture on its , ultimately asserts itself in any conflict – whatsoever may be the degree & extent of physical occupation .

Glory of the ancient past is the greatest asset of Iran & if would look bare & without dress if Iran throws it off , Iran will lose its identity in the myriad jungle of hundreds of other nations who have no or little history & who are here to get one .

We must know that the institution of orthodoxy & puritanism carried to such extremes has no justification or rationality in the Iranian context. This is an Arabian rather than an Iranian feature.

We have to remember that Islamic intellectualism found its perfect fruition & best expression first in Iran & it is to this land that the greatest philosophers as well as the greatest poets , painters & other artists of Islam belong. They have raised their country to the stature of a great culture without which Iran has no personality & no individuality.

IRANIAN MYSTICISM

DIVINE LOVE

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Most of the great medieval Sufis lived saintly lives, dreaming of God, intoxicated with God. When they tried to tell their dreams, being men, they used the language of men. If they were also literary artists, they naturally wrote in the style of their own day and generation. In mystical poetry the Arabs yield the palm to the Persians. Any one who would read the secret of Sufism, no longer encumbered with theological articles nor obscured by metaphysical subtleties--let him turn to 'Attar, Jalaluddin Rumi, and Jami, whose works are partially accessible in English and other European languages. To translate these wonderful hymns is to break their melody and bring their soaring passion down to earth, but not even a prose translation can quite conceal the love of Truth and the vision of Beauty which inspired them. Listen again to Jalaluddin: "He comes, a moon whose like the sky ne'er saw, awake or dreaming, Crowned with eternal flame no flood can lay. Lo, from the flagon of Thy love, O Lord, my soul is swimming, And ruined all my body's house of clay. When first the Giver of the grape my lonely heart befriended, Wine fired my bosom and my veins filled up, But when His image all mine eye possessed, a voice descended, 'Well done, O sovereign Wine and peerless Cup!'" The love thus symbolized is the emotional element in religion, the rapture of the seer, the courage of the martyr, the faith of the saint, the only basis of moral perfection and spiritual knowledge. Practically, it is self-renunciation and self-sacrifice, the giving up of all possessions--wealth, honour, will, life, and whatever else men value--for the Beloved's sake without any thought of reward. I have already referred to love as the supreme principle in Sufi ethics, and now let me give some illustrations. "Love," says Jalaluddin, "is the remedy of our pride and self-conceit, the physician of all our infirmities. Only he whose garment is rent by love becomes entirely unselfish." Nuri, Raqqam, and other Sufis were accused of heresy and sentenced to death. "When the executioner approached Raqqam, Nuri rose and offered himself in his friend's place with the utmost cheerfulness and submission. All the spectators were astounded. The executioner said, 'Young man, the sword is not a thing that people are so eager to meet; and your turn has not yet arrived.' Nuri answered, 'My religion is founded on unselfishness. Life is the most precious thing in the world: I wish to sacrifice for my brethren's sake the few moments which remain.'" On another occasion Nuri was overheard praying as follows: "O Lord, in Thy eternal knowledge and power and will Thou dost punish the people of Hell whom Thou hast created; and if it be Thy inexorable will to make Hell full of mankind, Thou art able to fill it with me alone, and to send them to Paradise." In proportion as the Sufi loves God, he sees God in all His creatures, and goes forth to them in acts of

charity. Pious works are naught without love. "Cheer one sad heart: thy loving deed will be More than a thousand temples raised by thee. One freeman whom thy kindness hath enslaved Outweighs by far a thousand slaves set free." The Moslem *Legend of the Saints* abounds in tales of pity shown to animals (including the despised dog), birds, and even insects. It is related that Bayazid purchased some cardamom seed at Hamadhan, and before departing put into his gaberline a small quantity which was left over. On reaching Bistam and recollecting what he had done, he took out the seed and found that it contained a number of ants. Saying, "I have carried the poor creatures away from their home," he immediately set off and journeyed back to Hamadhan--a distance of several hundred miles.

IRANIAN MYSTICISM

DIVINE LOVE

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This erotic and bacchanalian symbolism is not, of course, peculiar to the mystical poetry of Islam, but nowhere else is it displayed so opulently and in such perfection. It has often been misunderstood by European critics, one of whom even now can describe the ecstasies of the Sufis as "inspired partly by wine and strongly tinged with sensuality." As regards the whole body of Sufis, the charge is altogether false. No intelligent and unprejudiced student of their writings could have made it, and we ought to have been

informed on what sort of evidence it is based. There are black sheep in every flock, and amongst the Sufis we find many hypocrites, debauchees, and drunkards who bring discredit on the pure brethren. But it is just as unfair to judge Sufism in general by the excesses of these impostors as it would be to condemn all Christian mysticism on the ground that certain sects and individuals are immoral."God is the Saqi {Cupbearer} and the Wine:He knows what manner of love is mine,"said Jalaluddin. Ibn al-'Arabi declares that no religion is more sublime than a religion of love and longing for God. Love is the essence of all creeds: the true mystic welcomes it

whatever guise it may assume."My heart has become capable of every form: it is a pasture for gazelles and a convent for Christian monks,And a temple for idols, and the pilgrim's Ka'ba, and the tables of the Tora and the book of the Koran. I follow the religion of Love, whichever way his camels take.

My religion and my faith is the true religion.We have a pattern in Bishr, the lover of Hind and her sister,and in Qays and Lubna, and in Mayya and Ghaylan."Commenting on the last verse, the poet writes:

"Love, *quâ* love, is one and the same reality to those Arab lovers and to me; but the objects of our love are different, for they loved a phenomenon, whereas I love the Real. They are a pattern to us, because God only afflicted them with love for human beings in order that He might show, by means of them, the falseness of those who pretend to love Him, and yet feel no such transport and rapture in loving Him as deprived those enamoured men of their reason, and made them unconscious of themselves."

IRANIAN MYSTICISM

DIVINE LOVE

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Any one acquainted, however slightly, with the mystical poetry of Islam must have remarked that the aspiration of the soul towards God is expressed, as a rule, in almost the same terms which might be used by an Oriental Anacreon or Herrick. The resemblance, indeed, is often so close that, unless we have some clue to the poet's intention, we are left in doubt as to his meaning. In some cases, perhaps, the ambiguity serves an artistic purpose, as in the odes of Hafiz, but even when the poet is not deliberately keeping his readers suspended between earth and heaven, it is quite easy to mistake a mystical hymn for a drinking-song or a serenade. Ibn al-'Arabi, the greatest theosophist whom the Arabs have produced, found himself obliged to write a commentary on some of his poems in order to refute the scandalous charge that they were designed to celebrate the charms of his mistress. Here are a few lines: "Oh, her beauty--the tender maid! Its brilliance gives light like lamps to one travelling in the dark. She is a pearl hidden in a shell of hair as black as jet, A pearl for which Thought dives and remains unceasingly in the depths of that ocean. He who looks upon her deems her to be a gazelle of the sand-hills, because of her shapely neck and the loveliness of her gestures." It has been said that the Sufis invented this figurative style as a mask for mysteries which they desired to keep secret. That desire was natural in those who proudly claimed to possess an esoteric doctrine known only to themselves; moreover, a plain statement of what they believed might have endangered their liberties, if not their lives. But, apart from any such motives, the Sufis adopt the symbolic style because there is no other possible way of interpreting mystical experience. So little does knowledge of the infinite revealed in ecstatic vision need an artificial disguise that it cannot be communicated at all except through types and emblems drawn from the sensible world, which, imperfect as they are, may suggest and shadow forth a deeper meaning than appears on the surface. "Gnostics," says Ibn al-'Arabi, "cannot impart their feelings to other men; they can only indicate them symbolically to those who have begun to experience the like." What kind of symbolism each mystic will prefer depends on his temperament and character. If he be a religious artist, a spiritual poet, his ideas of reality are likely to clothe themselves instinctively in forms of beauty and glowing images of human love. To him the rosy cheek of the beloved represents the divine essence manifested through its attributes; her dark curls signify the One veiled by the Many; when he says, "Drink wine that it may set you free from yourself," he means, "Lose your phenomenal self in the rapture of divine contemplation." I might fill pages with further examples.

The philosophical history of Iran

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The philosophical history of Iran

Iranian beautiful view point

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Iranian beautiful world

The precepts that have this in view are very diffuse ; the moral requirements are however characterized by mildness . It is said : if a man loads you with revilings , and insults , but subsequently humbles himself , call him your friend . We read in the *VANDIDAD*(= وندیداد) , that sacrifices consist chiefly of the flesh of clean animals , flowers and fruits , milk and perfumes . It is said there , " As man was created pure and worthy of Heaven , he becomes pure again through the law of the servants of *Ahuramazda* , which is purity itself ; if he purifies himself by sanctity of thought , word , and deed . What is "Pure Thought = پندارنیک" ? That which ascends to the beginning of things .What is " Pure Word=گفتارنیک"? The Word of *Ahuramazda* (the word is thus personified and imports the living Spirit of the whole revelation of *Ahuramazda*) .What is "Pure Deed =کردارنیک" ? The humble adoration of the Heavenly Hosts , created at the beginning of things . It is implied in this that man should be virtuous : his own will , his subjective freedom is presupposed .*Ahuramazda* is not limited to particular forms of existence . Sun , moon and five other stars , which seem to indicate the planets – those illuminating and illuminated bodies – are the primary symbols of *Ahuramazda* : the *Emeshaspand*=امشاسپند , his first sons .

The history of Iran

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Iranian beautiful view point !

Light Puts man in a position to be able to exercise choice ; and he can only choose when he has emerged him . But Light directly involves an Opposite namely , Darkness ; just as Evil is the antithesis of Good .As man could not appreciate Good , if Evil were not ; and as he can be really good only when he has become acquainted with the contrary , so the Light does not exist without Darkness . Among the Iranians, Ahuramazda or Ahriman present the antithesis in question . Ahuramazda is the Lord of the kingdom of Light – of Good ; Ahriman that of Darkness – of Evil .

Ahuramazda is the Lord of Light , and He creates all that is beautiful and noble in the World , which is a kingdom of the Sun . He is the excellent , the good , the positive in all natural and spiritual existence . Light is the body of Ahuramazda ; thence the worship of Fire ,because Ahuramazda is present in all Light ; but He is not the Sun or Moon itself .In these the Iranians venerate only the Light , which is Ahuramazda . Zoroaster asks Ahuramazda who He is ? He answers : My name is the ground and center of all existence - Highest Wisdom and Science – Destroyer of the Ills of the World , and maintainer of the Universe – Fulness of Blessedness – pure Will , etc . That which comes from Ahuramazda is living , independent , and lasting . Language testifies to His power ; prayers aer his productions .

Darkness is on the contrary the body of Ahriman ; but a perpetual fire banishes him from the temples .

The chief end of every man ,s existence is to keep himself pure , and to spread this purity around him .

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philosophical history of Iran

The Religion of Zoroaster

The chief point in Iranian philosophical history is the *doctrine* of Zoroaster . In contrast with the wretched hebetude of Spirit which we find among the Hindoos , a pure ether – an exhalation of Spirit – meets us in the Iranian conception . In it , Spirit emerges from that substantial Unity of Nature , that substantial destitution of import , in which a separation has not yet taken place – in which Spirit has not yet an independent existence in contraposition to its object. This Universal , Eternal , Infinite Essence is not recognized at first , as conditioned in any way ; it is Unlimited Identity . This is properly (and we have already frequently repasted it) also the character of Brahma(= برهما) But this Universal Being became objective , and their Spirit became the consciousness of this its Essence ; while on the contrary among the Hindoos this objectivity is only the natural one of the Brahmins , and is recognized as pure Universality only in the destruction of consciousness . Among the Iranians this negative assertion has become a positive one ; and man has a relation to Universal Being of such a kind that he remains positive in sustaining it . This one , Universal Being , is indeed not yet recognized as the free Unity of Thought ; not yet worshipped in Spirit and in Truth ; but is still clothed with a form – that of Light . But Light is not a Lama (= لاما), a Brahmin (= برهمن) a Mountain , a brute – this or that particular existence – but sensuous Universality itself ; simple manifestation .

The Iranian Religion is therefore no idol-worship ; it dose not adore individual natural objects , but the Universal itself . Light admits , moreover , the signification of the Spiritual ; it is the form of the Good and True – the substantiality of knowledge and volition as well as of all natural things .

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philosophical history of Iran

Speciality – the involvement with limited nature – is consequently abolished. Light, in a physical & spiritual sense, imports, therefore, elevation – freedom from the merely natural. Man sustains a relation to Light – to the Abstract Good – as to something objective, which is acknowledged, revered, & evoked to activity by his Will. If we look back once more – & we cannot do so too frequently – on the phases which we have traversed in arriving at this point, we perceive in China the totality of a moral Whole, but excluding subjectivity; this totality divided into members, but without independence in its various portions. We found only an external arrangement of this political Unity. In India, on the contrary, distinctions made themselves prominent; but the principle of separation was unspiritual. We found incipient subjectivity, but hampered with the condition, that the separation in question is insurmountable; & that Spirit remains involved in the limitations of Nature, & is therefore a self-contradiction. Above this purity of Castes is that purity of Light which we observe in Iran; that Abstract Good, to which all are equally able to approach, & in which all equally may be hallowed. The Unity recognized therefore, now first becomes a principle, not an external bond of soulless order. The fact that everyone has a share in that principle, secures to him personal dignity.

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philosophical history of Iran

Thus the transition which we have to make ,(from the latest period of history to the period history of Iran) is only in the sphere of the Idea , not in the external historical connection . The principle of this transition is that the Universal Essence , which we recognized in *Berahma* , now becomes perceptible to consciousness – becomes an object & acquires a positive import for man . *Berahma* is not worshipped by the Hindoos : he is nothing more than a condition of the Individual , a religious feeling , a non-objective existence – a relation , which for concrete vitality is that of annihilation . But in becoming objective , this Universal Essence acquires a positive nature : man becomes free , & thus occupies a position face to face as it were with the Highest Being , the latter being made objective for him . This form of Universality we see exhibited in Iran , involving a separation of man from the Universal essence : while at the same time the individual recognizes himself as identical with a partaker in , that essence . In the Chinese & Indian principle , this distinction was not made . We found only a unit of the Spiritual & the Natural . But Spirit still involved in Nature has to solve the problem of freeing itself from the latter . Rights & Duties in India are intimately connected with special classes , & are therefore only peculiarities attaching to man by the arrangement of Nature. In China this unity presents itself under the conditions of *paternal government* . Man is not free there : he possesses no moral element , since he identical with the external command *obedience is purely natural, as in the filial relation* – not the result of reflection & principle .

In the Iranian principle : Unity first elevates itself to the distinction from the merely natural : we have the negation of that unreflecting relation which allowed no exercise of mind to intervene between the mandate & its adoption by the will .

In the Iranian principle this unity is manifested as *Light* , which in this case is not simply light as such , the most universal physical element. But at the same time also *spiritual purity* – the Good.



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